

## Integrate Your Program: Aligning the ASCA National Standards With the Georgia Performance Standards

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### Abstract

Professional school counselors must clearly establish and articulate the purpose and goals of their school counseling program and its relationship to student achievement in order to become integral participants in the school reform movement. By aligning Georgia's Performance Standards and the ASCA National Standards, counselors can realize measurable gains in student achievement as well as demonstrate program effectiveness. Designed to assist Georgia's school counselors in developing programming which aligns counseling standards with academic standards, this article includes examples of standards alignment at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Suggestions for program delivery, teacher collaboration, promoting cultural responsive practices, and assessment of program effectiveness are discussed.

### Integrate Your Program: Aligning the ASCA National Standards With the Georgia Performance Standards

Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and *The National Education Goals Report: Building a Nation of Learners* (National Education Goals Panel, 1991), the school counseling profession has been struggling to solidify its place in the education reform movement. What has thrived, however, is the movement to a standards-based educational model. As a result, academic standards in content areas such as English/Language Arts, Social Science, Mathematics, and Science have been written to identify content and performance standards applicable to all students across all grade levels. Standards of achievement serve both to clarify and to raise expectations, and standards provide a common set of expectations. Standards-based education, student academic achievement,

and accountability have become the language of the work in schools. Therefore, in an effort to identify as partners in student achievement and further define the role of the school counselor, the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) developed the national standards for school counseling programs (Campbell & Dahir, 1997) and a framework by which they can be administered.

The framework of the ASCA National Model (2005) helps to align the comprehensive school counseling program with the school's core mission, that of teaching and learning. ASCA has created a framework that allows for fine-tuning on the part of states, individual districts, and departments to define more intimately the needs of students in their respective areas. This allows programs to share a uniformity of vision, but fulfill the vision in diverse ways according to the needs of the students. The clearly stated purpose of the National Model is to encourage school counselors to provide leadership and serve as advocates, change agents, and collaborators to ensure student success (ASCA, 2005).

An additional response to the educational reform movement, the Transforming School Counseling Initiative [TSCI] (Education Trust, 1997), in collaboration with the DeWitt Wallace-Readers Digest, the ASCA, the American Counseling Association (ACA), and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) focused on redefining the role of the school counselor. This new vision for school counselor training and practice requires a focus on identifying and removing the inequities and other barriers to student achievement. The TSCI promotes a more systems-focused approach where the counselor functions as social justice advocate through leadership, collaboration, counseling, consultation, assessment, data analysis, and the implementation of evidence-based programs designed to eliminate the achievement gap (Education Trust, 1997).

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## Being Both Counselor and Educator

As definitions of the school counselor role and identity have evolved, concern and consternation have surfaced in terms of who the school counselor is: a counselor or an educator (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Brown & Trusty, 2005)? Simply by looking at the numbers of students in schools who suffer from biological and environmental barriers to learning (i.e., ADHD, having an alcoholic caregiver), a case can be made for the school counselor to focus solely on the mental health needs of students. Often the only professional in a building with mental health training, the school counselor is the central contact for supporting immediate and on-going clinical services. Choosing to work in a school setting is indicative of supporting the teaching and learning process and, therefore, puts counselors in the role of educator. School counselors are at the hub of the educational experience, having knowledge of student, teacher, administrator, family, and community. This affords the school counselor the opportunity to advocate for each student's educational achievement at each of these levels. The level of educational attainment continues to determine the quality of life for most individuals, and the focus on changing systems which do not fully support all students requires an education specialist (Paisley, Ziomek-Daigle, Getch, & Bailey, 2006).

Paisley et al. (2006) encourage that both the roles of counselor and educator be embraced rather than expend energy in a debate to determine which is more consistent with the current vision of school counseling as defined by ASCA and TSCI. The practicing school counselor quite simply operates as both in order to address student-focused and systems-focused barriers to student achievement. Perhaps something to consider in this debate, however, is that school counselors possess a unique skill set and professional disposition that other school professionals do not. It would seem beneficial for professional school counselors to focus on supporting the core mission of schools utilizing the unique clinical, consultative, and collaborative skills other education professionals do not possess. It is in this way the school counselor can demonstrate how students are improved given their participation in a comprehensive counseling program.

## The ASCA Standards and the Georgia Performance Standards

With the passage of the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* (U. S. Department of Education [USDE], 1994), U.S. lawmakers acknowledged the importance of high

standards in improving education. Since that time, the call for higher standards has come from all areas: administrators, teachers, teachers unions, state- and national-level educational organizations, business and community leaders, parents, and students (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory [NCREL], 2010). Sadly, this legislation along with other reports and proposals for school reform neglected to consider school counseling as integral to improving school success and counseling programs "were ignored as a means to improve student achievement and help students prepare for the future" (Dahir, 2001, p. 322). In order to address this lack of consideration, the ASCA National Standards were developed to demonstrate how vital and integral school counselors and school counseling programs are to student success.

The ASCA standards address the content knowledge, skills, and attitudes all students need to acquire in a school counseling program. They are comprised of three broad and interrelated areas: academic development, career development, and personal/social development (Hogan, 1998). Each standard is more fully defined by skill competencies and indicators of desired student learning outcome. The academic standards describe what students need to know and achieve academically and the career standards focus on the successful transition from school to the world of work. The personal/social standards provide a foundation for students' personal and social growth and development which in turn contributes to academic and career success (Hogan, 1998). The standards identify not only the role school counselors must play in supporting the academic mission of schools, but provide the basis by which administrators, teachers, and parents can know how school counseling programming enhances the core academic standards. A copy of the ASCA standards can be downloaded using the following internet address: <http://www.schoolcounselor.org/files/NationalStandards.pdf>

The Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) have been developed and systematically implemented in an effort to meet the school improvement goals of the Georgia Department of Education (GADOE). According to the GADOE website:

The performance standards provide clear expectations for instruction, assessment, and student work. They define the level of work that demonstrates achievement of the standards, enabling a teacher to know "how good is good enough." The performance standards isolate and identify the skills needed to use the knowledge and skills to problem-solve, reason, com-

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municate, and make connections with other information.

They also tell the teacher how to assess the extent to which the student knows the material or can manipulate and apply the information (GADOE, n.d.).

The GPS are comprised of the following content areas: English Language Arts & Reading,

Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Fine Arts, Health Education, Physical Education, Modern Languages & Latin, and Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE). Generally, the GPS are divided into grade level standards by K-5, 6-8, and 9-12. Currently, several areas (i.e. CTAE and Science) are under review for future implementation. Public schools across the state have based their curricula on these standards and state-wide assessments such as the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT), End-of-Course Tests (EOCT), and Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHS GT) are intended to assess how well students perform according to these learning standards.

## Character Education and Guidance Quality Core Curriculum

The development and implementation of the GPS replaces the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC) for all content areas previously used throughout Georgia as part of the Georgia Learning Connections material. The process of replacing the QCC standards with the GPS has been taking place gradually since 2004 and is virtually complete for all the core academic areas. At this time, the author is unaware of any plan for development or implementation of new school counseling standards by the Georgia Department of Education. Currently, the QCC for both Character Education and Guidance are available online and may be used to bring stated goals for Georgia students into alignment with the GPS and ASCA standards.

The Georgia Character Education and Guidance QCC, like the GPS, are divided into grade level by K-5, 6-8, and 9-12. The Character Education QCC consists of the same three strands for each grade level: Citizenship, Respect for Others, and Respect for Self. Each strand has identified topics and performance standards for each topic. The Guidance QCC also consists of three strands in each grade level: Self Knowledge, Educational and Occupational Exploration, and Career Planning, each with identified topics and standards.

The task of aligning or “crosswalking” the Georgia QCC and the ASCA standards with the GPS will assist Georgia school counselors and other school leaders in developing exemplary programs in all areas. Crosswalking core academic content standards and school counseling standards provides students with an integrated perspective of the core mission of schools and the life skills required to achieve success in school and beyond.

## Crosswalking the Standards

The vision to integrate school counseling standards with the academic mission of schools is infused throughout the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005). The National Model, created to “more clearly define and unify professional identity and practices” (Schellenberg, 2008, p. 10), provides a framework to establish comprehensive, developmental programs. The standards, competencies, and indicators complement a more academic-focused school counseling program as opposed to the more mental-health focused model of the past. This does not mean the mental health needs of students have been abandoned, as such services are built into the model, only that school counselors link interventions to the core mission of schools and become accountable for the contributions to student outcomes (Paisley & Hayes, 2003).

Crosswalking, or standards blending as coined by Schellenberg (2008, p. 32), is a “systems-focused, integrative, and student centered approach that directly and overtly aligns school counseling programs with academic achievement missions.” This programmatic approach requires that school counselors use their dual role of counselor and educator in an effort to meet the mental health and educational needs of all students. Schellenberg recommends focusing on language arts and mathematics standards as both content areas have traditionally been the basic core of the teaching and learning process. In addition, the focus on language arts and mathematics will support schools in attaining the reading and math proficiency requirements as outlined by NCLB.

The national standards in school counseling describe “what students should know and be able to do as a result of participating in a school counseling program” (Campbell & Dahir, 1997, p.1). Just as for Math and English teachers, counselors are accountable for creating, delivering, and ensuring the effectiveness of their curricula. School counselors can select which standards to align based on instructional guidelines, consultation with teachers, and as identified by examination of test scores,

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state and/or classroom assessment data, and other performance data (Schellenberg, 2008). Appendix A demonstrates the alignment of an ASCA standard from each domain (academic, career, and personal/social) with both a Georgia Guidance QCC and a GPS. The academic standard is aligned with 3rd grade Science, the career standard is aligned with a 7th grade Social Studies, and the personal/social standard is aligned with high school English Language Arts and Reading. The blending of the standards into one unit compliments each area and allows students to build both extrinsic and intrinsic meaning given the integration of the counseling component.

## Inclusion and Program Delivery

With regard to program delivery, the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2005) identifies large group guidance lessons, small group work, and individual work as the traditional forms of instruction and intervention. Classroom guidance, consisting of structured developmental lessons, is identified as an effective means to deliver the counseling standards to students (Whiston & Quinby, 2011). Developmental guidance lessons provide an ideal format by which to integrate academic and counseling curriculum as opposed to pulling students out of class or usurping their recess, music, or P.E. time. Teachers are not requested to sacrifice academic or instructional time spent in preparation for high-stakes testing (Clark & Breman, 2009). Guidance lessons offer both counselors and teachers an opportunity to integrate content as well as increase the relevance for students. According to Akos, Cockman, and Strickland (2007):

...classroom guidance has inherent variance that includes how systematically it reaches all students, how sequential it is (building on previous curricula), how classroom dynamics interact (subject, teacher, student configurations), and how numerous pedagogical classroom considerations operate (e.g., teacher- or student-centered lessons, lecture or activity based, classroom management) (p. 456).

Helping students understand the relationship of academic content to the possibilities and potentials of life during and after high school increases student interest and participation.

In the planning and delivery of classroom guidance, Akos et al. (2007) ask school counselors to consider the concept of differentiation. Prevalent as an instructional strategy for teachers, differentiating instruction means to incorporate the varying learning styles of the various

learners into the lesson. Given the counselors' understanding of the developmental diversity of students, even for those within the same grade, such a consideration makes sense. However, planning for multiple learning needs is still a challenge.

Akos et al. (2007) offer a two-prong preparation model for planning and delivering differentiated classroom guidance. First, determine students' needs by assessing their (a) readiness to understand and apply new knowledge and skills, (b) interest levels in order to determine the varying levels of motivation, and (c) learning styles, given not all students learn by the same delivery method or pace. Secondly, after determining student needs, counselors can then differentiate lessons based on content (what the students need to learn), process (the manner in which they learn), and product (the way student understanding is assessed). Identified as a school counselor best practice, differentiating curriculum gives the school counselor language with which to work collaboratively with teachers and ensure the material is delivered in an appropriate and effective manner.

Small group work and individual work within the classroom setting is another possible method of delivering curriculum (Clark & Breman, 2009). Focusing on a more systemic definition of integration, Clark and Breman describe an "inclusion model [which] ideally would be one that embraces the concept of providing academic and social-emotional support to all students through a myriad of approaches, a variety of services and innovation interventions in classroom settings" (p. 7). Also identified as a best practice in educating a diverse student population, this model purports the use of student collaboration and peer-mediated instruction, teaching responsibility, peace-making, self-determination, the use of technology, and the use of supports and accommodations. As an example, Clark and Breman offer utilizing a peer tutoring or peer mentoring program whereby students follow-up on a counselor/teacher introduced lesson without oversight.

A similar, favorite delivery method of the author is to divide classes into groups, each group having a unique task to perform within the time allotted. (Each task is related to the central theme of the aligned standards). The teacher leads one group, the counselor another, and the remaining groups are student-managed. The student-managed groups can incorporate group work or individual work depending on the nature of the curriculum being introduced or reinforced. Students rotate through the different tasks and are accountable for the content of each. Incorporating small group and individual work



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into the classroom further integrates the school counseling program by meeting the diverse academic and social-emotional needs of students while supporting the core mission of schools.

**Teacher collaboration and consultation.** Teachers are actively interested in being collaborative with school counselors (Clark & Amatea, 2004). In fact, in their study of teachers' perceptions and expectations of school counselors, Clark and Amatea indicate that the theme which emerged most frequently for teachers was that of "teacher-counselor communication, collaboration, and teamwork" (p. 135). They continue:

Teachers and pre-service counselors commented on the need to work together for the good of their students. This theme ties in very well with the philosophy of the ASCA National Standards (Campbell & Dahir, 1997) and the ASCA National Model (2003a), particularly with regard to the delivery system component (Clark & Amatea, 2004, p. 137).

The work must begin in small steps. Integrating school counseling standards across the curriculum will take time and dedication. Start with one teacher-ally and a willingness to measure the effectiveness of the lesson for both sets of standards. Appendix B provides the reader with a potential lesson plan developed for another 3rd grade Science standard. Based on an on-line unit created by Lori Miller (2009) of Wacona Elementary School in Waycross, GA, a school counselor could work collaboratively with such a teacher to incorporate the indicated ASCA standard and Georgia QCC. By adding a question or two to the existing worksheets or adding an additional piece to the assessment process, the school counselor could not only align counseling standards, but convey how such decision-making builds valuable life skills such as problem-solving and maintaining personal safety.

While it is still necessary that school counselors convey to the teachers and administrators the role and specialized training they possess, working to align standards can lead to increased mutual respect, understanding, and higher student achievement.

**Assessment.** Most evaluation methods include behavioral observations and measurement of knowledge and content standards. Formal assessments such as student self reports, needs assessments, case studies, portfolios, student resumes, journal entries, school records, standardized assessments, surveys and questionnaires, and pre/post inventories can be utilized to demonstrate the effectiveness of the collaboration between professionals

and impact on student academic achievement and social-emotional development. Indirect assessments such as feedback from parents, employers, counselors, and teachers can also be indicators of student progress.

Regardless of the method, it is vital that data be collected and the results shared in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of the school counseling program. To be viewed as simply support rather than integral to the core mission of schools could result in the loss of jobs which clearly means the loss of protective services for students. The contributions of school counseling must not be lost or diminished because of a lack of data collection.

## Addressing the Achievement Gap

For school counseling, effectiveness can be measured in terms of students' academic achievement and increased social capital. Of particular concern is being able to measure the increased achievement by those students who are impacted by academic and non-academic barriers to that achievement. School counseling programs must address these barriers to student learning and accomplishment regardless of their origins. In as much as school counselors are trained to be social justice advocates, they must also incorporate and model culturally responsive practices.

Gay (2006) defines culturally responsive practice as the use the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective; it teaches to and through the strengths of students. Translating this definition to the classroom means identifying and using the diverse nature of students to construct the teaching and learning experience based on the array of lived experience each brings. This concept views diversity as an asset rather than a deficit and thus, requires a shift in the pedagogical core of a system. Understanding how students and teachers make meaning is critical to the creation of empowered and engaged students. A curriculum that aligns itself with that construct will undoubtedly produce quality outcomes for previously marginalized students.

In an effort to close the achievement gap through standards alignment, Schellenberg and Grothaus (2009) used small group work as the strategy with 3rd grade African-American males. They reported gains for these students in both academic and counseling curriculum areas as well as increased self-esteem. The academic areas reinforced in the group were Math and Language Arts. The counseling curriculum "offered opportunities to appreciate students' cultural backgrounds and the strengths these provide"

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(Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2009, p. 442) so as to counteract projected negative messages and attitudes. This research is promising in that it supports school counselor's efforts to close the achievement gap. In addition, the infusion of academic content in counseling work supports the overall mission of schools.

Such integration allows counselors, teachers, and administrators another means by which to implement more culturally responsive practices. Steen and Kaffenberger (2007) also advocate for the integration of academics into counseling work. Again using small group work as the intervention strategy, improvement of student attitude toward academic achievement was realized. The purpose of the group for was to "help students increase learning behaviors (i.e., actions such as asking questions, completing assignments, and staying on task) and improve academic achievement, while addressing their personal/social concerns such as changing families, friendships, and/or anger management" (Steen & Kaffenberger, 2007, p. 516). Another facet of this intervention was to use communication strategies to collaborate with teachers and parents to support student learning. It is in these ways the school counselor can implement systems- and student-focused interventions in order to reduce and eliminate barriers.

## Conclusion

The decision of which ASCA standards to align with which GPS is often made given the needs of a particular group of students. Ideally, the state's professional organizations (i.e., Georgia School Counseling Association, Georgia Association of Educational Leaders) could initiate the development of a state model for school counseling programs. State-level leadership can influence local practice through the development and implementation of a state model (Martin, Carey, & DeCoster, 2009) which includes a standards crosswalk. ASCA has available the material and guidance necessary to develop a state model as well as the materials needed to crosswalk the counseling and academic standards. Providing Georgia's school counselors with a unifying document containing a philosophy of practice and counselor-led strategies and interventions for each content area and level can only further equip Georgia's counselors with the tools to offer best educational and culturally responsive practices.

Modeling collaborative relationships with teachers supports student development and healthy life skills. Putting into action an aligned curriculum can foster critical thinking, improved decision-making, and increased stu-

dent achievement. Students may become more motivated to invest in the overall school program given the increased relevance they glean from integrated lessons. Ultimately, aligning school counseling standards with academic achievement provides school counselors the opportunity to function as both education specialist by reinforcing academic standards, and simultaneously as mental health specialist by addressing the personal/social and emotional development of students (Schellenberg, 2008).

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## Appendix A

### ASCA Standard, Guidance QCC & GPS – Sample

ASCA Domain & Standard	ASCA Competencies & Indicators	GA Guidance QCC	GA Performance Standard
<b>Academic</b>  <b>Standard C</b> Students will understand the relationship of academics to the world of work and to life at home and in the community.	<b>Competency C1</b> <b>Relate school to life experiences.</b>  <b>A:C1.6</b> Understand how school success and academic achievement enhance future career and vocational opportunities.	<b>Strand: 3B:8</b> <b>Topic:</b> Awareness of how work relates to the needs and functions of society. <b>Standard:</b> Describe how work can satisfy personal needs. Describe the products and services of local employers. Describe ways in which work can help overcome social and economic problems.	<i>3<sup>rd</sup> grade: Life Science</i> <b>S3L2. Students will recognize the effects of pollution and humans on the environment.</b> a. Explain the effects of pollution (such as littering) to the habitats of plants and animals. b. Identify ways to protect the environment. • Conservation of resources • Recycling of materials
<b>Career</b>  <b>Standard C</b> Students will understand the relationship between personal qualities, education, training and the world of work.	<b>Competency C1</b> <b>Acquire knowledge to achieve career goals.</b>  <b>C:C1.5</b> Describe the effect of work on lifestyle  <b>C:C1.6</b> Understand the importance of equity and access in career choice.	<b>Strand: 7B:5</b> <b>Topic:</b> Understanding the relationship between work and learning. <b>Standard:</b> Demonstrate effective learning habits and skills. Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of personal skills and attitudes to job success. Describe the relationship of personal attitudes, beliefs, abilities, and skills to occupations.	<i>7<sup>th</sup> grade: Social Studies</i> <b>SS7E5 The student will analyze different economic systems.</b> a. Compare how traditional, command, and market economic economies answer the economic questions of (1) what to produce, (2) how to produce, and (3) for whom to produce. b. Explain how most countries have a mixed economy located on a continuum between pure market and pure command.
<b>Personal/Social</b>  <b>Standard A</b> Students will acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and interpersonal skills to help understand and respect self and others.	<b>Competency A2</b> <b>Acquire interpersonal skills.</b>  <b>PS:A2.5</b> Recognize and respect differences in various family configurations  <b>PS:A2.7</b> Know that communication involves speaking, listening and nonverbal behavior.	<b>Strand: 9-12A:2</b> <b>Topic:</b> Skills to interact positively with others <b>Standard:</b> Demonstrate effective interpersonal skills. Demonstrate interpersonal skills required for working with and for others. Describe appropriate employer and employee interactions in various situations. Demonstrate how to express feelings, reactions, and ideas in an appropriate manner.	<i>Grades 9-12: English Language Arts and Reading</i> <b>ELABLR2 The student participates in discussions related to curricular learning in all subject areas. The students</b> a. Identifies messages and themes from books in all subject areas. b. Responds to a variety of texts in multiple modes of discourse. c. Relates messages and themes from one subject area to those in another area.



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## Appendix B

### School Counseling Lesson Plan Worksheet

**Grade Level:** 3<sup>rd</sup> grade

**Lesson Title:** Pollution and people.

**ASCA Standard(s) & Competency(ies):**

PS: B Students will make decisions, set goals and take necessary action to achieve goals.

PS:B1 Self-Knowledge Application

PS: C Students will understand safety and survival skills

PS:C1 Acquire Personal Safety Skills

**GA Guidance QCC:**

3:C.9 Topic: Understand how to make decisions

Standard: Describe how choices are made. Describe what can be learned from making mistakes. Identify and access problems that interfere with attaining goals. Identify strategies used in solving problems. Identify alternatives in decision making situations. Describe how personal beliefs and attitudes affect decision making. Describe how decisions affect self and others.

**GA Performance Standard:** 3<sup>rd</sup> grade Science – Life Science

*S3L2. Students will recognize the effects of pollution and humans on the environment.*

- a. Explain the effects of pollution (such as littering) to the habitats of plants and animals.
- b. Identify ways to protect the environment.
  - Conservation of resources
  - Recycling of materials

**Objectives (indicators):**

PS:B1:2 Understand consequences of decisions and choices

PS:C1.2 Learn about the relationship between rules, laws, safety and the protection of rights of the individual

**Activity(ies):**

Learning module lesson on pollution - <http://www.alienteacher.com/pollution/pollution.html>

**Materials:**

Computer access, pens, markers, crayons for poster, recycling bags

**Evaluation:** Pre – post survey

**Total Time:** One – two weeks.